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ABSTRACT

Although Thomas Jefferson was not an educator, his concern with issues relating to education raised controversy during the founding years of the United States and these issues continue to be topics of serious debate today. Some are the relationship between public and private education, school administration, equal opportunity for education, and social reform through education. Jefferson's fundamental educational question was the nature and role of education in a new nation committed to principles of liberty and quality. The educational needs in the new United States as viewed by Jefferson are reflected in the education he obtained while becoming a statesman, his political activity, his acceptance of the Doctrine of Natural Rights, his perception of the role of education in a free society, and his establishment of the University of Virginia. Jefferson's educational contributions lie in the realm of the "why" of teaching, rather than the "how", and in initiating discussion of several controversial issues. (Author/ND)

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# THOMAS JEFFERSON AND THE EDUCATION OF A NEW NATION

Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr.

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FASTBACK 73

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# THOMAS JEFFERSON AND THE EDUCATION OF A NEW NATION

By Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr.

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## FOREWORD

Thomas Jefferson was America's Renaissance Man. His interests and abilities were global. Although a college dropout, he was characterized by Edmund Randolph as a gentleman who could "calculate an eclipse, survey an estate, tie an artery, plan an edifice, try a cause, break a horse, dance the minuet, and play the violin." While not an educator, Jefferson had significant educational impact in a variety of directions from urging schooling for craftsmen and technicians to the protection of a free press to assure the flow of information to the citizenry. No other individual at the national level in the first days of the Republic did more for education.

Oft quoted statements reveal Jefferson's faith in the importance of education as an essence in a free society. He saw popular sovereignty, based upon an educated body politic, as the only safe depository of government. And if the people were not able to make correct decisions, the remedy would not be to take power from them but to "inform them by education." He believed reason and persuasion to be the key instruments in democratic learning and living, claiming, "To make way for these, free inquiry must be indulged." He preached a crusade against ignorance: "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be." Thus, he opposed "any tyranny over the mind of man."

In this fastback Dr. Wagoner has space but to introduce us to several of the most important of Jefferson's contributions. His plans for state funding of the education of meritorious students were too advanced for the Virginia legislature of his day. Jefferson clearly recognized that ability was not just a province of the elite class and, while his proposals were not Jacksonian in terms of mass public education, they provided a means whereby worthy scholars would be forwarded in their education and their fruition would accrue to the benefit of the state, as well as to themselves. Jefferson did attain his dream for the establishment of a unique state university as a capstone for the aristocracy of talent he wished to promote. Nevertheless, he understood the fundamental import of public education for all and even urged a constitutional amendment toward that end.

Richard E. Gross
Stanford, California

## INTRODUCTION

Ours is no longer a "new nation." Two hundred years have passed since Thomas Jefferson and fifty-five other patriots pledged their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor to an idea. The idea to which they committed themselves was simple enough: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Every schoolchild in the United States is introduced to the words early, right along with the Pledge of Allegiance and the ABCs. The generation of 1776 wrote the words, fought for the words, and the generation of 1976 diligently repeats them. Sometimes with understanding and appreciation. Sometimes not. As children and nations grow older, they are prone to forget.

Educators are not immune to the process of forgetting either, maybe just because there is so much we feel we should remember. After years of lectures and seminars, workshops and institutes, the words pile up like hours, credits, certificates, and degrees. We strain to keep abreast of the latest "innovations" and constantly stuff our vocabularies with a steady diet of tasteless jargon. The meaning of it all? We sometimes forget. The purpose of it all? Perhaps we lose sight of that too, if once we knew.

But what has any of this to do with Thomas Jefferson, or perhaps more appropriately, what does Thomas Jefferson have to do with any of this? Potentially, at least, a great deal. If Charles Silberman, author of *Crisis in the Classroom*, is near the mark, then possibly the most serious problem facing both our schools

and our society today is "mindlessness." "By and large," Silberman wrote in 1970, "teachers, principals, and superintendents are decent, intelligent, and caring people who try to do their best by their lights. If they make a botch of it, and an uncomfortably large number do, it is because it simply never occurs to more than a handful to ask *why* they are doing what they are doing—to think seriously or deeply about the purposes or consequences of education." It is precisely at the level of "purposes" and "consequences of education" that Jefferson remains relevant to us today, as much for the issues he confronted as for the solutions toward which he worked.

Jefferson was not a teacher in the conventional sense. In terms of pedagogy, his occasional methodological prescriptions are for the most part quite outdated and are of interest to us now, if at all, only as a measure of the distance we have traveled from the practices of his day. More importantly, however, Jefferson's concern with such issues as the relationship between public and private education, the most efficient and effective means of organizing, controlling, and financing schools, the selection and treatment of the gifted, the rights of minorities, application of the principle of equality of opportunity, the efficacy of the school as an agent of social reform, and other educational matters which caught his attention not only raised controversy during his own day but continue to be topics of serious debate at the present time. Jefferson was not and is not the final authority, the last word on these issues. It is perhaps enough that he was often the first word, foremost among leaders of the revolutionary generation who forced these questions into the public forum and who maintained that the answers decided upon would have an effect not only upon the character, but perhaps even upon the survival of the new nation. Jefferson's educational contributions to his countrymen in the 1770s and in the 1970s thus lie not in the realm of the "how" of teaching but in the "why" of teaching. Jefferson's specific answers need not go unchallenged, but his questions we dare not avoid.

The fundamental educational question before Jefferson was, of course, the nature and role of education in a new nation committed to principles of liberty and equality. The question, as Jefferson forcefully insisted, was at once social and political as well as

educational. The influences, experiences, and convictions that formed Jefferson's response and guided his efforts in behalf of the educational development of the new nation provide the substance of our inquiry. The perspective we gain will hopefully contribute to the reexamination of purpose needed in a nation two hundred years older which still recites the same ideals.

## THE MAKING OF A STATESMAN

*The Education of a Planter*

Thomas Jefferson stands as a contradiction to the American success legend. He was not a "self-made man" in the classic style of Benjamin Franklin or Abraham Lincoln, both of whom achieved fame in spite of obscure beginnings. Virginia was sparsely settled when Jefferson was born on April 13, 1743, and Shadwell, his birthplace in Albemarle County, was on the fringe of the frontier. However, the circumstances of Jefferson's childhood were far from impoverished. As the third child and first son of Peter and Jane Randolph Jefferson, Thomas fell heir not only to favored social standing and a share of impressive family property holdings, but also was afforded the educational advantages reserved for the Virginia gentry.

In a day when formal schooling of any sort was more the exception than the rule, young Jefferson was introduced early in life to the world of learning. At about the age of five he was placed under the care of a tutor and received instruction in reading, writing, and conventional religious precepts. He was nine when he was sent to a boarding school attended by a few other boys and conducted by a minister who, according to Jefferson's later observation, "was a superficial Latinist" and even "less instructed in Greek." When at the age of fourteen Jefferson enrolled in the Latin school of the Reverend James Maury, he found a teacher who was not only a "correct classical scholar," but one who stirred in him an appreciation for the beauties and intricacies of the Eng-

lish language as well. Under Maury's keen eye, Jefferson developed the ability to read Greek and Roman authors in the original, a practice he continued throughout his life.

Jefferson's education to his seventeenth year was quite in keeping with the expected pattern of one of the gentry in Virginia. Tutors and private teachers provided the necessary grounding in the classics and liberal arts, and home life was instructive in the responsibilities of coming adulthood as well as in the attendant social graces. The woods and streams of Albemarle held their lessons for Jefferson too, and he developed not only a deep affection for the secrets of nature, but gained skill in outdoor pursuits as well. However, if by privilege of birth and early education Jefferson was properly groomed in the skills and sensibilities appropriate for the life of a Virginia planter, his later experiences and continued education directed him into the conduct of affairs much more demanding. Jefferson was not merely a product of his age, but in time became the chief prophet of a new age.

*Schooling in Manners, Morals, and Politics*

In the early spring of 1760, when England was being amused and favored by the presence of the witty American philosopher and scientist, Benjamin Franklin, Jefferson left the hills of Piedmont, Virginia, and traveled eastward to the capital at Williamsburg. Neither Williamsburg nor the College of William and Mary, in which Jefferson was enrolled for two years, could be deemed impressive by other than colonial standards. Although Williamsburg was undoubtedly the largest town Jefferson had then seen, the entire community covered only a square mile and, except when the Assembly was in session, numbered less than two thousand inhabitants. The college itself could boast of only about a hundred scholars, including the president and six professors. Except for William Small, who was the only professor to enlist Jefferson's admiration and affection, the members of the faculty were all Anglican clergymen.

Dr. Small proved to be an important element in Jefferson's education. Small made Jefferson his daily companion and from him, Jefferson noted, "I got my first views of the expansion of science, and of the system of things in which we are placed." In effect, Small was William and Mary for Jefferson, for except for a few

months, Small was his only regular teacher. Rational and scientific rather than religious and didactic, Small quickened Jefferson's interest in Enlightenment philosophy and the useful sciences, and, as the only layman on the faculty, no doubt contributed to his growing anticlericalism as well.

Small figured significantly in Jefferson's intellectual development in yet another important way. It was through Small that Jefferson made the acquaintance of George Wythe, a prominent jurist under whom Jefferson studied law for five years after completing college. In devoting himself to the private study of law, Jefferson was following the approved procedure for those who did not venture to England for legal training. Not until after the Revolution did formal legal instruction begin in the United States, and it was Wythe himself who, through arrangements made by Jefferson as governor in 1779, assumed the first law professorship in the country by giving lectures on the subject at William and Mary.

Into the untitled "junto" of Jefferson, Small, and Wythe there entered a fourth individual who contributed to Jefferson's social and political development. The Royal Governor, Francis Fauquier, already a close friend of Small and Wythe, frequently invited Jefferson to the palace for dinner, conversation, and entertainment. Fauquier's reputation as a man of taste, refinement, and erudition clearly impressed Jefferson, and though he was critical of the vices that accompanied the social life of the Tidewater elite, just as he had rejected the extravagant gambling, heavy drinking, and occasional riotous behavior of his college chums, he could later recall Williamsburg as "the finest school of manners and morals that ever existed in America."

For Jefferson no doubt it was. As one who could "tear himself away from his dearest friends, to fly to his studies," and as one who hated indolence and became a penetrating critic of the society in which he was nurtured, Jefferson was perhaps uniquely suited to glean from his Williamsburg experiences those qualities which fashioned a man who in all respects could be accounted a gentleman. If clearly not a self-made man on the style of Franklin, Jefferson nonetheless shared with his cosmopolitan compatriot the ability to turn varied experiences into lessons on the right conduct of life. Some years later in giving advice to his daughter Martha, Jefferson penned a phrase that

the creator of *Poor Richard* could fully appreciate: "No person will have occasion to complain of the want of time who never loses any." And as his own life's history was to demonstrate, Jefferson further observed: "It is wonderful how much may be done if we are always doing."

By all accounts, Jefferson was "doing" steadily at Williamsburg. Through his association with Governor Fauquier, Jefferson met many public officials and leading politicians and frequently attended sessions of the General Court. It was while standing in the doorway of the Chamber of Burgesses that the twenty-two-year-old Jefferson heard Patrick Henry denounce the Stamp Act in terms that brought cries of "Treason!" from the floor. The fiery orator's blast against the policies of the crown made a deep impression upon the young law student who would also in brief time enlist his energies in the same cause. Williamsburg was indeed a school of manners and morals. For Jefferson it became a school of revolutionary politics as well.

## JEFFERSON AND THE "BUSINESS OF LIFE"

Jefferson had by no means completed his education when he began to practice law at the age of twenty-three. Williamsburg had but baptized Jefferson in the intellectual and political climate of the Enlightenment. Throughout his entire life Jefferson sought knowledge wherever it might be found. In conversation, in correspondence, via observation and experimentation, and always through reading, he endeavored to enlarge his understanding of the universal laws he felt were awaiting man's discovery. An avid collector of books, he amassed three libraries during his lifetime. The first library, begun with forty books he had inherited from his father, was lost with the burning of his home at Shadwell in 1770. For the next forty-five years he carefully built up another, gathering books from Europe as well as America and cataloguing each according to the paradigm of universal knowledge developed by Bacon in the *Advancement of Learning*. When he sold his library to Congress in 1815, thus providing the nucleus of the Library of Congress, his collection numbered nearly 6,500 volumes. By the time of his death in 1826, he had again collected nearly a thousand volumes. These books he hoped might form the basis of the library of the university he was then founding in Charlottesville, but upon Jefferson's death his executor was forced to sell the collection in order to pay off a portion of the indebtedness of Jefferson's estate. Jefferson's love of books was far more than that of a mere collector, however, and one might suppose that there is at least a hint of truth as well as humor to President John F. Kennedy's remark on the occasion of a dinner for Nobel

laureates of the Americas that the assembled guests represented "the most extraordinary collection of talents . . . that has ever been gathered together at the White House, with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone."

Jefferson entered early and labored long in the affairs of government, and it is, of course, for achievements in the affairs of state that he is best known. After only a few years as a practicing lawyer, he was elected, at the age of twenty-five, to the Virginia House of Burgesses. For the next forty years he was drawn ever more deeply into the throes of active public life. As one of Virginia's delegates to the Continental Congress, it was Thomas Jefferson who in spirited and reasoned language drafted the document which proclaimed the independence of the United States. In the fall of 1776, Jefferson returned to his native state to continue the struggle for independence through service as a member of the state legislature. At the age of thirty-six, he was elected governor of the state. In 1794, Jefferson accepted the mission as Minister to France and upon his return assumed the duties first of secretary of state under George Washington and then vice president under John Adams. From 1801 to 1809, Jefferson himself carried the responsibilities of the nation's highest office. Even after his retirement from public life and his return to Monticello in 1809, Jefferson performed the role of elder statesman for two decades, rendering advice and giving suggestions on numerous subjects of concern to men on both sides of the Atlantic. And as if such a record of service to his countrymen were not enough, Jefferson dedicated much energy in the closing years of his life to bringing to fruition a dream he had long nourished: the University of Virginia.

As much as Jefferson may have longed for the rural simplicity and elevated style of life traditionally claimed by those of his station and means, his catholicity of interests and his intense concern for the present and future course of the American experiment in self-government left him little time for leisure. It is no small measure of Jefferson's greatness that he could combine in one person the interests and talents of the scientist and the humanist, the political theorist and the shirt-sleeves politician, the agrarian and the cosmopolitan, the democrat and the aristocrat. Jefferson's taste for fine wines and good music was matched by his interest in improved farming techniques, the flora and fauna

of the American wilderness, and the living conditions of men of all stations and races which inhabited the continent. His own love of freedom and desire for privacy was tempered by his willingness to devote his energies and his reputation to the demands and criticisms of public service. The meticulous detail that marked his design of Monticello, the state capital in Richmond, and eventually the buildings of the university he founded was equaled in the conscientious care he gave to the drafting of numerous laws designed to eliminate privilege and insure the benefits of a republican form of government. Whether at any moment his attention was rivited on government, law, religion, education, architecture, or on the many branches of science and philosophy, Jefferson devoted himself to practical detail as well as to theory. In all he labored as a master architect who fashioned blueprints designed to stand the test of time. That now, after the passage of two centuries, we still appropriately find in Jefferson much that is timeless and relevant to problems of our own day is in itself adequate testimony to the firmness of the foundations he laid.

One must turn to more comprehensive volumes to gain a full appreciation of Jefferson's contributions to fields as diverse as those which attracted his twin of the American Enlightenment, Benjamin Franklin. Yet even this hasty accounting indicates that Jefferson was only partly correct when he wrote late in life: "I was a hard student until I entered on the business of life, the duties of which leave no idle time to those disposed to fulfill them; and now, retired, and at the age of seventy-six, I am again a hard student." Unquestionably, idle time was a scarce commodity for Jefferson after his student years, but as is attested to by his voluminous private and public writings, his varied interests and concerns, and his constant activity in the cause of human liberty, Jefferson was always a hard student.

## JEFFERSON AND THE RIGHTS OF MAN

There is no comprehending the full significance of Jefferson's prescriptions for the education required of a new nation without first coming to terms with the larger concerns which gave coherence to all his major endeavors. Jefferson could not lay claim to the development of a philosophy in full and systematic form, but in his political writings and in many of the more than 50,000 letters which have survived, the essential elements of his thought are consistently evident. Dumas Malone, the premier biographer of Jefferson, has noted that the best single clue to Jefferson's motives in the Revolution and throughout his entire career was his concern for "the attainment and maintenance of liberty." While Jefferson's methods may have changed to meet particular problems, his devotion to the cause of protecting man's unalienable rights remained constant. Nearly half a century after giving classic form to the assertion of the rights of man in the Declaration of Independence, he could still proclaim: "Nothing is unchangeable but the inherent and unalienable rights of man."

*The Doctrine of Natural Rights*

As an apostle of the Enlightenment, Jefferson accepted fully the doctrine of natural rights. Taking his cue from John Locke, he believed that government was instituted among men by consent, and that the rights to which "the laws of Nature and of Nature's God" entitled them must not be usurped by government in any form. In his *Summary View of the Rights of British America*, which predated the Declaration by two years, Jefferson unequi-

vocally stated his position: "The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time; the hand of force may destroy, but cannot disjoin them." In neither the *Summary View* nor the Declaration of Independence was Jefferson arguing on historical grounds; rather, his conviction that men were born free was fundamentally a moral one.

Jefferson's belief in the moral rightness of equality and liberty was not of the half-a-loaf variety. In proclaiming the equality and natural rights of man, Jefferson did not distinguish between men on the basis of their race. While it is true that he himself owned slaves, he was acutely aware of the contradiction presented by the institution of slavery and the dictates of natural law. Early in his career as a legislator in Virginia, Jefferson, along with a senior member of the Assembly, had sought to ameliorate the condition and possibly bring about the manumission of slaves. The effort met with dismal failure, and Richard Bland, the legislator who had taken the lead, was denounced as an enemy of his country. When as a young lawyer Jefferson had argued against slavery and invoked the rule of nature which proclaimed we are all born free, he likewise lost his case and cause. Further, in drafting the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson strongly condemned the slave trade. However, the delegates from South Carolina and Georgia, who wanted the slave trade continued, as well as some northern delegates who questioned the propriety of laying the guilt for the traffic in human life almost totally on the head of George III, succeeded in having the entry deleted. Jefferson's attempt as author of the Ordinance of 1784 to halt the spread of slavery in all future states to the West also met defeat, although in the more famous Ordinance of 1787 slavery was prohibited in the limited region northwest of the Ohio River. Even Jefferson's desire to free his own slaves upon his death was circumscribed by law and the destitute condition of his estate.

While Virginia in 1778 finally prohibited the further importation of slaves, Jefferson was never able to effect complete emancipation. He regarded slavery as cruel and as damaging to the morals of the masters as to the spirit of the slaves, and he feared for the future of the country if slavery were allowed to continue.

In taking a pessimistic view concerning the future relations between the races, Jefferson was conditioned by the society of which he was a part. His countrymen could not at the time en-

vision emancipation, and the idea of extending the doctrines of liberty and equality to blacks and Indians was beyond the reach of all but the most enlightened. From his own observations, Jefferson advanced "as a suspicion only" the possibility that blacks, "whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in endowments both of mind and body." Such a conclusion could not harmonize with Jefferson's basic beliefs, however, and he cautioned that an unfavorable conclusion about the blacks might "degrade a whole race of men from the rank in the scale of beings which their Creator may perhaps have given them." Jefferson himself tried to maintain an open mind regarding the equality of the races of man, and in a letter to the mathematician, Benjamin Banneker, expressed his hope that time would prove that the races were equal. "Nobody wishes more than I do," Jefferson said, "to see such proofs as you exhibit that nature have given to our black brethren talents equal to those of the other colors of men, and that the appearance of a want of them is owing merely to the degraded condition of their existence, both in Africa and America."

*God and the Faith of the Enlightened*

An integral part of Jefferson's natural rights philosophy was his conception of God as the author of the universe and the giver of the rights Jefferson accepted as "unalienable." True to the Enlightenment circle, Jefferson viewed God as the supreme craftsman who had in the beginning set in motion laws which governed the universe and all that inhabited it. His lifelong interest in nature and the care with which he recorded his own observations and those of others regarding the functioning of both the human and the natural worlds were but expressions of his belief in an orderly universe ordained by God at creation.

Intertwined with his belief in the benevolence and wisdom of an all-powerful Creator was his belief in the necessity of change and a faith in the certainty of progress. "The Creator has made the earth for the living, not the dead," he enjoined. To Jefferson, the heavy hand of the past should not be allowed blindly to restrict the present course of events. Jefferson himself was drawn into revolutionary action "by emergencies which threatened our country with slavery, but ended by establishing it free," and during that struggle maintained that "the tree of liberty must be

refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants." Even so, the object of the Revolution of 1776 was to put an end to structures and traditions which interfered with the rights of man and thus make unnecessary future bloody revolutions. By asserting that "the earth belongs in usufruct to the living" and that "the dead have neither powers nor rights over it," Jefferson was attesting to his confidence in the ability of free men to use their God-given reason to secure their legitimate rights and to enjoy the fruits of progress.

During his own lifetime, Jefferson was often accused of being irreligious or atheistic. His lack of sympathy with the formulas and conventions of religious sects and his rejection of the doctrine of supernatural revelation were seized upon by some as proof of his godlessness. Jefferson's own approach to religion, however, is perhaps best exemplified in the advice he gave his nephew, Peter Carr. Urging his nephew to approach the New Testament critically, Jefferson advised: "Your own reason is the only oracle given to you by Heaven; and you are answerable, not for the rightness, but the uprightness, of the decision." The same test Jefferson applied to the theory of the divine right of kings he applied as well to the mysteries of religion.

In approaching religion with the skeptical eye of a rationalist, Jefferson was prepared to accept the teachings of Jesus as "the purest system of morals ever before preached to man." By combining the teachings of Jesus with maxims found in the writings of certain classical authors, he erected his own system of ethics. He believed devoutly that God had instilled in every man a moral sense, and that beyond bearing allegiance to one's own conscience, one needed no authority. Jefferson was clearly anticlerical from his youth into old age. He believed priests, both Catholic and Protestant, had "adulterated and sophisticated" the teachings of Jesus, and while he maintained friendship with some among the "enlightened" clergy, he refused to accept either the authority of ecclesiastics or their traditional theology. Even as he sought to free his own mind from the shackles of dogma, however, his respect for the opinions of other men led him into a position of tolerance regarding all forms of religion. ". . . It does me no injury for my neighbor to say that there are twenty gods, or no god," Jefferson contended. "It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." Religion, for Jefferson, was strictly a private affair.

Not so private nor to be tolerated were structures, religious or political, which infringed upon the right of free men to think for themselves. "I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man" wrote Jefferson to Benjamin Rush in 1800. Jefferson's advocacy of religious toleration was thus coupled with his resistance to the privileges of an established church. The care of every man's soul belongs only to himself, he felt, and government should neither support nor oppose any particular church or sect.

Each element in the body of Jeffersonian thought leads inescapably to the conclusion he himself reached by 1776:

> . . . whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends [Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness], it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

In the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson held the King of England responsible for practices which were destructive of the rights of the people. But far more important than the charges levied against the king were the responsibilities now being laid upon the people themselves. In laying claim to the rights to which the people were entitled by the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God, Jefferson was placing the future protection of these rights in the hands of the people. "I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves," Jefferson observed some years later. And he added, significantly: ". . . if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education."

To Jefferson, then, the outcome of the American experiment in self-government depended upon the people, and the people enlightened. Proclaiming the rights of a free people was but a small step in comparison to the difficulties of winning and securing for generations to come the blessings of liberty. Education, both formal and informal, was to Jefferson an essential ingredient in the shaping of a new nation.

## THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN A FREE SOCIETY

*Securing the Rights of Free Men*

To Jefferson, education and politics were inseparable. Whenever he looked to education in any form, he did so with the eye of a statesman concerned with the welfare and rights of the citizenry. Conversely, in his political activities and writings, he was often self-consciously the master educator, striving to give structure and logic to the twin ideals of intellectual freedom and political liberty. Indeed, the two most famous of his early political writings, *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* and the Declaration of Independence, were in spirit and substance educational as well as political treatises. Jefferson himself testified to the educative role of the Declaration of Independence by asserting that his aim was:

> . . . Not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which have never been said before; but to place before mankind the common sense of subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we are compelled to take. Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion.

No matter how plain the language nor rational the principles, however, Jefferson realized that the message of the Declaration would be only slowly comprehended by many of his own generation on either side of the Atlantic. Neither proclamations nor

wars could guarantee the survival of a nation founded on lofty ideals. Thus, at the conclusion of his work in Philadelphia in the summer of 1776, Jefferson returned to Virginia, there to engage in the practical business of translating abstract principles into laws and institutions which would safeguard them for posterity.

Jefferson's labors during this critical period were clear both in purpose and motive, and at no other time, perhaps, was the essence of his philosophy so sharply set forth. Jefferson confided in his *Notes on Virginia* his fear of the consequences if every effort were not then made to lay the foundation for a truly republican form of government:

> . . . It can never be too often repeated, that the time for fixing every essential right on a legal basis is while our rulers are honest, and ourselves united. From the conclusion of this war we shall be going downhill. It will not then be necessary to resort every moment to the people for support. They will be forgotten therefore, and their rights disregarded. They will forget themselves, but in the sole faculty of making money, and will never think of uniting to effect a due respect for their rights. The shackles, therefore, which shall not be knocked off at the conclusion of this war, will remain on us long, will be made heavier and heavier, till our rights shall revive or expire in convulsion.

As a member of the legislative committee charged with completely revising the laws of the Commonwealth, Jefferson played a major role in drafting legislation designed to remove the shackles of privilege and injustice. His bills which led to the abolishment of entails and ended the practice of primogeniture were intended, as Jefferson later commented, to lay "the axe to the root of pseudo-aristocracy." Through other bills Jefferson established courts of justice, made more rational and humane the system of punishments for crimes, and liberalized provisions for the naturalization of foreigners. Not all of his legislative proposals were successful, as in the case of his advocacy of the gradual emancipation of slaves, and some of the 126 bills for which he was responsible, directly or indirectly, passed only after years of debate and sometimes in severely modified form.

A bill which did survive with only minor modifications, and one vastly important in its own right as well as in its relation to Jefferson's educational views was the *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom*. This act, which disestablished the Anglican church in Virginia, was prized by Jefferson as next only to the Declara-

tion of Independence in terms of his significant contributions to the freedom of man. His bill for religious liberty declared that no one could be compelled to attend any church nor be made to support any religion not of his own choosing; that one could be made to suffer no reprisals for his belief or nonbelief in religion; that, in sum, "all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities." Jefferson's satisfaction with the enactment of this guarantee of religious and intellectual freedom was reinforced by the favorable notice given the bill by the enlightened of Europe. In a letter to James Madison, Jefferson observed with pride: ". . . it is honorable for us to have produced the first legislature who had the courage to declare that the reason of man may be trusted with the formation of his own opinions."

*Toward the General Diffusion of Knowledge*

Jefferson's faith in the right of free men to be trusted with the formation of their own opinions lay at the basis of his lifelong interest in and concern for the advancement of education. Thus, when as part of the revised code of laws he introduced a *Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge*, he considered it at the time as the most important item in the entire legislative package. As with the bill which provided for religious liberty, Jefferson's education bill was designed as yet another blow against the traditions which limited intellectual freedom. And as with the bills which abolished entails and primogeniture, the *Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge*, had it passed in the form Jefferson devised and proved effectual in practice, might have had some effect in enhancing social mobility by increasing educational opportunity. "Worth and genius would thus have been sought out from every condition of life," Jefferson said later, "and [would have been] completely prepared by education for defeating the competition of wealth and birth for public trusts." Most importantly, Jefferson hoped the establishment of a system of public schools, as proposed in the bill, would elevate the mass of people to the moral status necessary to insure good government and public safety and happiness. The survival of all the freedoms being declared and fought for depended finally upon

the enlightenment of the people. "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization," stated Jefferson, "it expects what never was and never will be."

Jefferson certainly did not place upon the schools he proposed the total burden of maintaining freedom. The bill for the diffusion of knowledge and later educational measures Jefferson championed were but a part, though an essential part, of a complete system of laws and institutions designed to protect the rights being struggled for in the Revolution. In addition to institutional safeguards, Jefferson also valued and encouraged informal approaches to education. He frequently advised friends on the best methods of educating their children and proposed, along with the education bill, the establishment in Richmond of a public library. Years later, expressing concern for the continuing education of the adult population, he recommended the creation of small circulating libraries in every county. Jefferson was highly conscious, too, of the educational value of a free press, and declared on one occasion: "The basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." Jefferson hastened to add, however: "But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them."

Jefferson was only too aware of the fact that during his day not every man was capable of reading. Children of the well-to-do, as in his own case, might have the advantage of attending schools paid for by their parents, or perhaps might even enjoy the more individualized instruction afforded by a private tutor. Most Virginians, however, had to rely upon their parents or random pauper or charity schools for even the elementary schooling. Under such circumstances, Jefferson could hardly take for granted the degree of public enlightenment necessary to enable the people to recognize and seek to destroy ambition or tyranny, whatever its disguise, or to select "without regard to wealth, birth, or other accidental condition or circumstance" only those most fit for public office. "It is an axiom in my mind," wrote Jefferson to Washington in 1786, "that our liberty can never be safe but in the hands of the people themselves, and that, too, of the people

with a certain degree of instruction. This it is the business of the state to effect, and on a general plan."

It was just such a general plan that Jefferson submitted to the Virginia legislature in 1779. In the preamble to his bill, he reminded his colleagues of the possibility of the slow perversion of power into tyranny even in the best of governments and proposed that only through a proper system of education could this be guarded against. Rejecting the conventional wisdom of the day, Jefferson noted further that it was not sufficient merely to allow those to obtain an education whose parents could afford to pay tuition. The indigence of the majority of the population was such, he argued, that many children "whom nature hath fitly formed and disposed to become useful instruments for the public" have no opportunity for education. Jefferson's proposal, so simple to our ears, ran completely counter to the prevailing *laissez-faire* custom. It is better, he maintained, that all should be educated "at the common expense of all, than that the happiness of all should be confided to the weak or wicked."

The general provisions of Jefferson's bill are familiar. He projected a three-tiered system of education—elementary schools, grammar (secondary) schools, and university—the whole resting upon a public base. Each county, he proposed, should be divided into wards or "hundreds," each of sufficient size and population to maintain an elementary school. Reading, writing, and arithmetic would be taught in each school, with special attention being given to books that would instruct in ancient, British, and American history. It was through the study of history, Jefferson felt, that students, being exposed to "the experience of other ages and countries," would learn to recognize and thus thwart the revival of tyranny in any form. In his zeal to "illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large," Jefferson was perhaps overly confident about the learning abilities of children. As Merrill Peterson has observed, the rationalistic and verbalistic approach to education assumed appropriate by Jefferson was already being challenged by such European thinkers as Rousseau and Pestalozzi. But Jefferson was less concerned with the methods of pedagogy than with purpose and system. His primary concern was to create convenient and adequately supported schools which would provide the general population with the skills and

understanding necessary to perform their duties and protect their rights as citizens.

If in pedagogy Jefferson was conventional, he was hardly so in the comprehensiveness of his plan or in his call for public support of the schools he was proposing be erected throughout the state. On a small scale the principle of public education was not untried. For several generations certain New England communities had endeavored, with uneven success, to maintain common schools supported by the public. But Virginia, which at the time included the present states of West Virginia, Kentucky, western Pennsylvania, and the great expanse beyond the Ohio, was hardly on the order of a New England commonwealth. Thus, well in advance of the period when Horace Mann, Henry Barnard, and other fathers of the common school movement began their crusade for state organized and publicly funded school systems, Jefferson was proposing that his state undertake its own crusade against ignorance. To insure that even the poorest citizens would have access to education, Jefferson further proposed in his bill that "at these [elementary] schools all the free children, male and female, resident within the respective hundred, shall be entitled to receive tuition gratis, for the term of three years, and as much longer, at their private expense, as their parents, guardians or friends, shall think proper." Provision for the free education of all citizens, according to Jefferson's plan, would establish the foundation upon which the rest of the unified system of education could be erected.

In addition to providing a general education for the masses, Jefferson insisted that the state had an equal obligation to seek out and cultivate leaders, members of the natural aristocracy. It was expedient, he reasoned, that for the promotion of public happiness "those persons, whom nature hath endowed with genius and virtue, should be rendered by liberal education worthy to receive, and able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens. . . ." He thus proposed that at public expense, twenty grammar schools be fixed at appropriate geographical locations throughout the state. As boarding schools, these brick or stone structures were to contain rooms for lodging and dining as well as for classes. Complementing the traditional focus on Latin and Greek, these schools were also to incorporate English grammar, geography, and higher mathematics into the curriculum.

Of telling significance was Jefferson's provision for the continuing education of those students of greatest ability and promise. From each of the elementary schools, one boy whose parents could not afford to pay for additional education was to be selected annually for further education in a grammar school. After this additional year of schooling, one-third of this group would be discontinued as "public foundationers;" after the second year all the rest, "save one only, the best in genius and disposition," would bring their formal education to an end. The one best student in each of the grammar schools would continue his education free of charge for four more years. "By this means," Jefferson noted, "twenty of the best geniuses will be raked from the rubbish annually, and be instructed, at the public expense, so far as the grammar schools go." Jefferson further proposed that at the end of the six-year grammar school period, half the students in the "scholarship" group would end their studies, and perhaps would themselves become masters of grammar schools. The other half, chosen "for the superiority of their parts and disposition," were to be entitled to three more years of education at the College of William and Mary, still at state expense. Jefferson summarized the anticipated contribution of his bill by noting: "The general objects of this law are to provide an education adapted to the years, to the capacity, and the condition of every one, and directed to their freedom and happiness."

It is easy enough in the long perspective of history to find flaws in Jefferson's scheme. For all of his concern for the equalization of opportunity, his proposal still left the children of the wealthy with a clear advantage over those of less fortunate circumstance. Those who could pay need not stand the periodic examinations and run the risk of being weeded out; only the "public" students had to face such hurdles. In a sense then, Jefferson's proposal represented a modest compromise between public and private education. The advantages of birth and wealth remained, although now Jefferson was proposing that the children of the common folk be at least allowed to enter the contest.

It might also be objected that the very restrictions Jefferson placed on the upward flow of students was overly competitive and "elitist." Jefferson was an advocate of meritocracy long before that term was coined, but it seems unjust to charge him with the motive of seeking to create a privileged elite, even a natural

one. Jefferson's belief that citizens of superior talents were "the most precious gift of nature for the instruction, the trusts, and the government of society" was not in his mind at all antithetical to his belief that "Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone." His object was not to create classes of the rulers and the ruled, but, by providing opportunity for all to progress as far as their natures allowed, to render the people themselves the safe as well as the ultimate guardians of their own liberty. As it was, even his "modest" proposal to extend educational opportunity was radical in the context of eighteenth-century Virginia. Not only was his plan a direct strike against the aristocracy of birth and wealth, but his suggestion that the schools be maintained by public taxation placed the heaviest burden upon the very people who might indeed question why they should be asked to pay for the education of the poor, regardless of their talent.

Certainly Jefferson, who tended to place more importance on environment than on heredity, recognized that children from privileged homes might have an edge on those less fortunate. It is doubtful, however, that he could have been as fully conscious of the persistence of inequality resulting from early deprivation as our national experience to the present has demonstrated. It seems even less likely that he grasped the potential co-optive effects of his educational program. Once traversing successfully through Jefferson's proposed system, from elementary school through the university, a backwoodsman well might lose his natural coloration and might uncritically take on the attributes and veiwpoints of the eastern gentry. If so, his usefulness as a spokesman for the interests of the settlers in the western sections would possibly be compromised. But these are again concerns raised through a telescope two hundred years longer than Jefferson had available, and deal with a problem which, for all our debates concerning the rights and problems of minority groups, we seem no closer to solving.

Concern for the genuine application of the principle of equality of opportunity was clearly not among the reasons which prompted the legislature of Virginia to reject Jefferson's education bill, however. Madison informed Jefferson, who when the final vote was taken in 1786 was in France, that the leading objections to the plan were "the expense, which was alleged to

exceed the ability of the people" and "the difficulty of executing it in the present sparse settlement" of the state. Both arguments had some merit, but there were perhaps other objections which, though not expressed, account for the bill's defeat as well. The bill's provision that wards be created and that elected aldermen in the wards superintend the affairs of the schools, assess taxes, and perform other duties posed a threat to the officials of the county courts. The secular nature of the system was a feature not welcomed by religionists, while non-Anglican sectarian groups had reason to be suspicious of the potential influence given William and Mary in the bill. Jefferson himself felt the primary cause for the death of the bill was the reluctance of the people to bear the expense of the undertaking, and he urged his mentor and friend George Wythe to "Let our countrymen know . . . that the tax which will be paid for this purpose is not more than the thousandth part of what will be paid to kings, priests, and nobles who will rise up among us if we leave the people in ignorance." For the moment, however, Jefferson's pleas were in vain.

The defeat of the *Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge* did not signal an end to Jefferson's interest in the cause of a comprehensive system of public education. While Jefferson was in time to achieve greater success from his efforts directed toward the establishment of a university, he remained convinced that the general diffusion of knowlege throughout the entire population was essential in a democratic society. Within a year of the bill's rejection, Jefferson wrote to James Madison: "I hope the education of the common people will be attended to; convinced that on their good sense we may rely with the most security for the preservation of a due degree of liberty." He later commented that if he had to choose between the establishment of a university and the creation of primary schools, he would choose the latter, it being safer to have all the people moderately enlightened than a few highly educated and the masses in ignorance.

Jefferson could take little satisfaction from legislative action in 1796 which passed into law one portion of his general plan. In that year, the state legislature determined that elementary schools could be established in each county, but left the question of when and if the counties should operationalize the law up to the dis-

cretion of the county courts. This permissive provision of the statute weakened the measure beyond recognition, and it is hardly surprising that only one county took the law seriously and started schools.

Not until 1817 did Jefferson again pursue actively the establishment of primary or elementary schools in his home state. By this time, of course, he was officially in retirement, and was busily engaged in plans leading to the founding of the University of Virginia. In fact, Jefferson's submission of a revised school bill in 1817, the *Bill for Establishing a System of Public Education*, was a move designed to insure that elementary schools could be created without at the same time draining the state Literary Fund of monies needed for the launching of the university.

In most respects, Jefferson's *Bill for Establishing a System of Public Education* was similar to the bill he had submitted four decades earlier. It is perhaps worth noting, however, that in the 1817 bill, he proposed that certain privileges of citizenship be denied those who were illiterate. The state had a duty, Jefferson had long maintained, to provide for the education of its citizens, but in this bill he reflected his belief as well that citizens had obligations to the state. He did not seek to compel the attendance at school of those indifferent to its advantages, but he felt it entirely reasonable to withhold privileges of citizenship from those who neglected the opportunity to learn to use those privileges wisely. His bill, submitted in September, 1817, provided that "no person unborn or under the age of twelve years at the passing of this act, and who is compos mentis, shall, after the age of fifteen years, be a citizen of this commonwealth until he or she can read readily in some tongue, native or acquired."

It is significant that Jefferson, for all his concern for the making of Americans, did not insist that citizenship depend upon the ability to read English. At issue was the ability to read and thus understand and actively take part in the affairs of society. At issue, too, was a deeper question, which pitted the rights of individuals against the rights of the state. One finds a contemporary ring to the note Jefferson appended to this section of his bill:

> A question of some doubt might be raised on the latter part of this section as to the rights and duties of society toward its members, infant and adult. Is it a right or a duty in society to take care of their infant members in opposition to the will of the parent?

> How far does this right and duty extend?—to guard the life of the infant, his property, his instruction, his morals? The Roman father was supreme in all these; we draw a line, but where? Public sentiment does not seem to have traced it precisely. Nor is it necessary in the present case. It is better to tolerate the rare instance of a parent refusing to let his child be educated, than to shock the common feelings and ideas by the forcible asportation and education of the infant against the will of the father. What is proposed here is to remove the objection of expense, by offering education gratis and to strengthen parental excitement by the disfranchisement of his child while uneducated. . . . If we do not force instruction, let us at least strengthen the motive to receive it when offered.

As it happened, Jefferson need not have agonized over this issue, for Senator Joseph C. Cabell, who was championing Jefferson's plan in the legislature, felt it prudent before introducing the bill to strike this provision and others likely to distract from the chief purpose of the measure. Once again, however, Jefferson's plan met with defeat. The education bill which did finally receive legislative assent provided only for the education of the poor in "charity schools." Not until after the Civil War did Virginia take firm steps toward providing for the general education of all its citizens.

Disappointed that his state was still unwilling to develop an orderly and comprehensive system of education, Jefferson could at least rejoice in the news that Cabell had managed to engraft upon the bill which did pass a provision for a $15,000 annuity from the Literary Fund for the support of a state university. It is thus somewhat ironic that Jefferson, for all his labors to extend the opportunities of learning to the masses, found his greatest success as an educational statesman in the role of the founder of an institution which, at least initially, was limited to those who, through the accidents of wealth or birth as well as ability, represented the aristocracy of talent.

## "MR. JEFFERSON'S UNIVERSITY": IDEALS AND REALITIES

A visitor to the University of Virginia today is quickly impressed by the fact that the institution is still often spoken of as "Mr. Jefferson's University." The phrase not only indicates Jefferson's dislike of titles—he was the recipient of several honorary doctorates but, unlike Franklin, seldom was addressed as "Dr."—but reflects the more important fact that the university was as much Jefferson's personal creation as was Monticello or the Declaration of Independence. "Nothing," Merrill Peterson has observed, "contained so well the dominant forces of his life and mind, of democracy and enlightenment and nationality, as his vision of a great university." As evidenced by his epitaph, in Jefferson's own estimation, his service as "father of the University of Virginia" ranked as among the three greatest services he performed for his country. The Declaration of Independence proclaimed man's political freedom, the *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom* guaranteed religious liberty, and the University of Virginia embodied his long commitment to the blessings of intellectual freedom.

Thomas Jefferson was nearly eighty-three years old when he welcomed the first students to the University of Virginia. Almost half a century had passed since he first proposed the idea of a state university as the capstone of a general system of public education. Years of intensive legislative struggle, repeated disappointments, revised plans, and new starts had preceded the 123 students who wandered into Charlottesville in March, 1825. The

earth surrounding the impressive buildings was red and raw that spring, but grass and trees in time took care of that. The university itself was complete, its basic design architecturally and academically the product of one man's vision. Jefferson had been allowed to realize "the last act of usefulness" he could offer his country.

A New England editor visiting in Charlottesville in 1822 noted observing the aging Jefferson at the university building site "take a chisel from the hand of an Italian stonecutter and show him how to turn the volute of a capital." There could be no doubt then or in later years that the University of Virginia was clearly to be the lengthened shadow of one man. His aim was for a distinctive university, which would stand as a model not only in outward design, but more importantly in terms of spirit and ideals. As he had helped direct the nation on an independent course politically, so was he charting for the university an independent course educationally.

The most distinctive and significant element in Jefferson's design for the University of Virginia was his commitment of the institution to the principle of intellectual freedom. "This institution of my native state, the hobby of my old age," he wrote in 1820, "will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind to explore and to expose every subject susceptible of its contemplation." To another correspondent the following day he added: "For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error, so long as reason is left free to combat it." Academic freedom was not a term current in the lexicon of the early nineteenth century, but Jefferson was unmistakably declaring that in matters educational, as in matters political or religious, one's reason was to be the supreme and final arbiter of one's beliefs. Certainly when viewed in the context of the restraints on liberty common in other public as well as private colleges of the day, Jefferson's experiment in education shared the boldness of his stand for the American experiment in self-government. To Jefferson it would have been a mockery if less freedom were granted in the domain of the university than should prevail in society generally.

In educational as in political affairs, Jefferson sought to anchor his theoretical principles in institutionalized safeguards. Breaking with tradition, he proposed that the University of Vir-

ginia maintain a wall of separation between church and state by having no professor of divinity and by affiliating with no religious body. Further, no religious demands were to be made on either students or faculty. Compulsory chapel and required attendance at Sunday services, customary practices at other colleges, received no sanction at Virginia. The principles of the *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom* were to apply within the state's university as well as without.

Jefferson's conception of the freedom necessary in the making of a genuine university went beyond freedom from religious constraints. Students were to have freedom to explore a range of studies much more comprehensive and useful than was typical at the time. Jefferson was convinced of the value of the classical curriculum, and provided for the teaching of ancient languages and other elements basic to the prevailing definition of the education of a cultured man. But his university was also to contribute directly to human betterment, and in devising the curriculum for the University of Virginia, Jefferson sought to include "all the branches of science useful *to us*, and *at this day*. . . ." Thus, in addition to traditional collegiate studies, he proposed that the university offer work in architecture, modern languages, politics and law, medicine and anatomy, advanced mathematics, and numerous courses in the physical and natural sciences. He intended also that the university house a school of technical philosophy to which craftsmen in various fields of endeavor might come in the evenings to receive instruction in the sciences applicable to their occupations. Even though this latter provision was not carried out in the final ordering of studies, the curriculum adopted was decidedly more liberal and advanced than in other institutions of higher learning of the period.

Of singular importance was Jefferson's provision for an elective system at the University of Virginia. Students who qualified for admission were allowed to enter any school in the university and to select those courses they thought themselves prepared to handle. Jefferson explained this provision in a letter to a Harvard professor by noting:

> I am not fully informed of the practices at Harvard, but there is one from which we shall certainly vary, although it has been copied, I believe, by nearly every college and academy in the United States. That is, the holding of students all to one prescribed course of read-

ing, and disallowing exclusive application to those branches only which are to qualify them for the particular vocations to which they are destined. We shall, on the contrary, allow them uncontrolled choice in the lectures they shall choose to attend, and require elementary qualifications only, and sufficient age.

In terms of university reform the short-range impact of Virginia's system of electives was limited. Inspired by Jefferson, George Ticknor tried with slight success to have the elective system adopted at Harvard, and toward mid-century Brown, M.I.T., and a few other colleges flirted with the idea. Only in the post-Civil War period, however, did the elective system spread in seriousness to other colleges and universities. If the triumph of the elective system in the late nineteenth century should be credited more to societal and educational currents peculiar to that period than to Jefferson's direct influence, still one has to acknowledge, as did Harvard President Charles W. Eliot, that the Founder of the University of Virginia was the first person to preach with the utmost persistence the underlying doctrine of the elective system.

In establishing the university upon a foundation of freedom, Jefferson was aware of the risks involved, especially as they pertained to student conduct. In a letter to Thomas Cooper, several years before the university opened, Jefferson voiced his concern:

> The article of discipline is the most difficult in American education. Premature ideas of independence, too little repressed by parents, beget a spirit of insubordination, which is the great obstacle to science with us, and a principle cause of its decay since the revolution. I look to it with dismay in our institution, as a breaker ahead, which I am far from being confident we shall be able to weather.

Jefferson endeavored to gather information from colleges and universities in both Europe and America regarding their policies toward student discipline. The rules of Harvard and numerous other colleges were studied in detail in an effort to learn how other colleges weathered the seas of student rowdyness. As much as he was concerned about the deportment of any large body of young men brought together over an extended period of time, he nonetheless charted a liberal course. The long lists of rules and regulations and specified fines and penalties so common at other colleges were not allowed to set the tone for the University of Virginia. Rejecting fear as a way of dealing with the young, Jefferson stated:

> The human character is susceptible of other incitements to correct conduct, more worthy of employ, and of better effect. Pride of character, laudable ambition, and moral dispositions are innate correctives of the indiscretions of that lively age; and when strengthened by habitual appeal and exercise, have a happier effect on future character than the degrading motive of fear. Hardening them to disgrace, to corporal punishments, and servile humiliations cannot be the best process for producing erect character. The affectionate deportment between father and son offers in truth the best example for that of tutor and pupil.

Jefferson's decision to "studiously avoid too much government" and to treat Virginia students "as men and gentlemen, under the guidance mainly of their own discretion" was clearly in concert with his own deep conviction in the rightness of freedom.

Virginia's state university may have been launched on a plane much higher than the prevailing pattern, but the students who attended the institution proved all too typical. During the first summer there occurred a few "vicious irregularities," as Jefferson described them, and in the fall the first of a series of "riots" struck a heavy blow to the Jeffersonian code of honor. When Jefferson tried to address the students the day following the first major disturbance, he found himself emotionally unable to continue and had to yield to another Visitor who admonished the students for their breach of faith. In consequence of this episode, three students, including one of Jefferson's nephews, were expelled and others received lesser punishments. The faculty pressed the Board of Visitors for tighter regulations governing student conduct, and in the years following, the list of rules was increased. Not until the 1840s, long after Jefferson's death and subsequent to still more riotous behavior and even the killing of a professor, did the students of the University of Virginia in earnestness return to the principles laid down by the founder. In 1842, Virginia students adopted the "honor system." The particulars of the honor system, which spread from Virginia to countless other colleges in the nineteenth century, were post-Jeffersonian, but the ideals supporting the concept of student honor were unmistakably in the Jeffersonian tradition.

In yet another important respect did Jefferson's advocacy of freedom in his plans for the University of Virginia set in motion a concept most unorthodox at the time but later widely accepted. To Jefferson it was essential that professors enjoy special privi-

leges in pursuit of their duties. Determined to have as professors "either the ablest which America or Europe can furnish, or none at all," he was equally determined that they should enjoy the "illimitable freedom of the human mind." Professors were in effect given tenure for life and were assured that they would be unmolested internally or externally. In an effort to insure a lack of constraint within the university proper, Jefferson decided against centralizing authority in the office of university president. Instead, he provided for faculty governance by creating the office of Chairman of the Faculty and indicated that by means of a policy of rotating chairmanships the faculty would be able to supervise its own affairs. Until the opening decade of the twentieth century this pattern of administration was adhered to, but by 1904 the Visitors concluded that a more regularized system was needed. In that year, the University of Virginia inaugurated its first president.

A not insignificant departure from Jefferson's provision for complete academic freedom resulted from his own reservations concerning the political views of the professor of government and law. Before an individual had been selected for that post, Jefferson reserved to the Visitors the right to select textbooks in that field. This act in itself was not unusual, for the accepted practice at many colleges was for trustees to prescribe texts in all courses. But Jefferson was hardly anxious to pattern his university after the practices of other colleges, and the decision to exclude the professor of law from the otherwise generous policy of allowing professors complete freedom in the choice of texts was one not arrived at lightly.

Jefferson's motives in this instance, if in apparent contradiction to his basic principles, are nonetheless clear. His antipathy to the doctrines of Federalism and his lingering bitterness from earlier struggles with Alexander Hamilton and John Marshall culminated in a resolve to keep Federalist political views from contaminating the minds of Virginia students. So important was this matter that he dared not leave to chance the political teachings of the professor who most might influence the thoughts of future leaders. "It is our duty," he thus concluded, "to guard against the dissemination of such principles among our youth, and the diffusion of that poison, by a previous prescription of the texts to be followed in their discourses." What were the prescribed

texts? Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, Sidney's *Discourses on Government*, *The Federalist*, the Declaration of Independence, and Madison's Virginia Report of 1799 on the Alien and Sedition Laws—all respectable republican treatises. At Madison's suggestion, Washington's Farewell Address was added to the list.

The list of texts approved by the Visitors prescribed but did not proscribe. The law professor, unidentified at the time either as an individual or by ideology, could add books of his own choosing. Still, Jefferson's deepening concern over the political drift of the nation and his desire to keep alive the ideals of republicanism for which he long fought led him to a stand that compromised the libertarian spirit of the university. If in this instance Jefferson revealed himself as at odds with his own principles, we should not lose sight of those larger ideals to which, with human missteps along the way, he was dedicated.

Nor would it be proper to underestimate the radical departure from the status quo Jefferson's ideals and policies for the University of Virginia represented. Even though neighboring states had established publicly supported universities in advance of Virginia, it can be asserted with some correctness that the University of Virginia was America's first real state university, for the principles it championed almost alone at its inception have since been embraced by all leading state universities. The University of Virginia, based on Jefferson's plans, proposed to give instruction on a broader and more advanced level than existed elsewhere in the country at the time. Students were permitted to specialize in fields of their own choosing, and were given the privilege of electing those courses or lectures for which they felt prepared. Jefferson instituted the ideal of student as well as faculty freedom by establishing the university free of sectarian influence and dedicated to the illimitable freedom of the human mind. Infractions of the ideal, by students or Jefferson himself, did not remove the principle as a constant reminder of the nature of the institution. Indeed, instances in which actions fell short of the ideal are noteworthy precisely *because* of the ideal.

On July 4, 1826, fifty years to the day after the ratification by the Continental Congress of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson died. His activity in the cause of human freedom had ended, but his lasting contributions remained. Central among his

contributions was the University of Virginia, important in its own right and even more significant as a monument to his crusade against ignorance and his larger struggle to secure for posterity the blessings of liberty.

For Jefferson, education was too important indeed to be left to chance or reserved only for those who by circumstance of wealth could purchase it. In a government of free and equal men, education itself was to become not only a privilege but a right. To Jefferson it was axiomatic that the success of the American experiment in self-government depended in the final analysis upon the enlightened interest of the people. Our own recent history should bear evidence enough to the timeliness of Jefferson's warning that "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."

## A BICENTENNIAL POSTSCRIPT

From the vantage point of 1976, it might be argued that Jefferson's educational ideas and contributions, while perhaps interesting, have little relevance to the contemporary scene. After all, the educational landscape of the United States is vastly different from that of his day. Every state in the union can now boast of one or more public as well as private universities of staggering size and complexity. In addition, public and private liberal arts colleges, community colleges, technical institutes, and proprietary schools of all orders abound. Further, the unified system of education Jefferson repeatedly advocated but failed to see created is now a common feature in all states in the union. Even the existence of the "American system of education"—schools basically controlled and financed at the local level, articulated from the lowest grades through the university via statewide organization, and available to all citizens—is due more immediately to the special circumstances and energies of individuals of later periods than to Jefferson.

So why concern ourselves with Jefferson? Certainly there is ample justification in the knowledge that Jefferson is properly honored as the chief prophet of public education during the formative years of our nation's history. Long in advance of popular acceptance of the idea, Jefferson, as we have seen, persistently set forth a rationale for diffusing education throughout society. Moreover, his eventual success as founder of a distinctive state university places us in his debt. . . for no other reason, these contributions suggest the appropriateness of attending to Jefferson as educator, especially in the bicentennial year.

But it would be unjust to Jefferson and a disservice to ourselves to consider his contributions to education only as past events to be dusted off, admired on special occasions, and then returned to history for safekeeping. If we take Jefferson seriously at all, we must recognize that social and educational questions are not resolved by one individual or even one generation for all future generations, nor are the institutions and structures once laid down to be accepted as "the system" as if modifications or changes to meet new needs and new problems were impossible. To Jefferson, concern for the rights and happiness of man necessitated that structures be constantly examined in light of purposes, that institutions and conventions be made to encourage the noblest sentiments of man. This too is part of the Jeffersonian legacy. It was on the people of each generation that he placed the obligation of maintaining the blessings of liberty.

We can justly celebrate the contributions of our founding fathers and take due pride in the tremendous advances made educationally and socially from then to now. But we would be in violation of the trust Jefferson and his generation passed on to us if either in celebration or in mindless apathy we lost sight of the purpose of it all. Education to Jefferson, and hopefully to us, is not an end but a means. Jefferson's greatest contribution lies in directing our attention to those ends and thus providing for every generation a gauge by which to measure the spirit and direction of its endeavors.

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